George Hurst

THIS MAN REFUSED TO
BE BEATEN BY FATE
McNutt, William Slavens

Hv1792
H87 1925

M.C. MIGEL LIBRARY
AMERICAN PRINTING
HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

This Man Refused to be Beaten by FATE

HV 1783
.4
cop. 1
c. 1

By William Slavens McNutt

THE bravest and most utterly triumphant man I have ever known is George Sinclair Hurst, one of the advertising heads of a soap company in Glastonbury, Connecticut.

George Hurst met the most dreaded human affliction—blindness—and calmly, brainily, methodically fought it until nothing remained of the monster but a mere inconvenience.

The story of that victory is worth while because an understanding of it is equivalent to incalculable reinforcements of ingenuity and courage to anyone in any sort of a hard situation. *You cannot know the truth about George Hurst without knowing that your own problems, big or little, are a fraction of the size you thought them, and knowing, too, that your own courage and potential abilities are infinitely greater than you had ever dreamed.*

The battle began back in 1902, when Hurst was working his way through Yale. A snowball flung in fun struck him between the eyes. It was not a severe blow, but the pain that followed was intense and persisted.

That pain was a dread threat to the young student because sightlessness was a family tendency. No less than six of his ancestors within three generations had suffered complete loss of vision.

Hurst went immediately to a New York specialist and submitted to an examination. The doctor's verdict was the declaration of war. The young man was afflicted with the family ailment, glaucoma.

There was just the bare possibility that treatment might save him. With this dread knowledge and slight hope in his mind, Hurst went back to New Haven to continue his studies and the coincident business of earning a living.

Within two years the last glimmer of hope was gone. Hurst knew then that ultimate sightlessness was inevitable. He estimated that he had left perhaps ten years of gradually decreasing vision. Ten years to prepare for sightlessness! Within that time he had to make his own way in business and get ready for what should come after the curtain fell.

He had at that time one great ally, the example of his great-uncle, an Ulster-born Irishman and an engineer by profession, who was stricken with blindness while engaged, of all things, in building lighthouses on the Mississippi River. This indomitable ancestor had shut his Belfast jaw and gone right on building lighthouses on the Mississippi in spite of his affliction.

George Hurst decided that what had been done could be done again; that he could go into business, develop ability and reputation during the ten years left, and carry on after eyesight went as his ancestor had done before him.

His second and greater ally was a woman, the woman who became Mrs. Hurst in 1907. From then on he had a constant companion in the battle. He speaks of her part in the fight as "the incalculable aid of one who doesn't count the cost."

In 1907, the year of his marriage, he went to work in the advertising department of the J. B. Williams Soap Company in Glastonbury, Connecticut. According to estimate he yet had seven years of sight left him. Seven years to get ready, get ready for a life without eyes.

What do you think you would do under those circumstances? What method of preparation would you pursue? There are certain definite limitations which sightlessness imposes and no magic in Heaven or on earth will remove them. Hurst understood this. He realized that he was not going to be able to win his fight by the mastery of any mechanical trick. He could, and did, daily imagine himself performing his work without eyes. He trained his ears to transmit vocal descriptions correctly to his mind so that when the eyes went he would be the better able to get true mental impressions of things of which he was told. But the real fight was spiritual and had nothing to do with method. Hurst believed that if he succeeded in losing nothing of himself but his eyesight, he could carry on successfully.

First of all he had to compel himself to believe absolutely and at all times that when it became necessary he could carry on successfully without the use of his eyes. He did this, did it not by any vaudeville trick, but by full employment of the power and will that is common to us all.

Next he had to eliminate and keep constantly out of his consciousness all taint of resentment, despair or fear. He knew, you see, that the presence in his mind of any of these qualities would result ultimately in the loss, to him, of something more than his eyes—the loss of normal courage, normal cheerfulness, normal joy in living, capacity for normal reactions to the problems of business and life that he would have to meet.

He knew that he could not avoid the loss of his eyesight nor escape from certain definite physical limitations which that loss would entail. He believed, however, that by constant courageous exercise of will he could prevent the coincident crippling or impairment of any other faculty of mind, soul or body. Steady in this conviction, he did his daily work and went his way through a gradually dimming world to the thing he knew awaited him.

THE estimate he had made proved too generous. Six years after he went to Glastonbury the curtain fell. Before it dropped, Hurst had a show-down talk with his employers. He told them that he believed he could carry on his job successfully without eyes, but that if he could not he wanted to change and work at something he could do successfully.

Carrying on imperfectly would have involved a loss of self-respect and Hurst was determined still that nothing worth while of himself should depart when his eyes went.

"I believe he can do it," the head of the firm said in a conference that followed Hurst's statement of his case. "I believe Hurst without eyes will do more for us than anyone else I know with eyes."

Shortly thereafter came the end of vision for George Hurst. That was eleven years ago and since that time he has carried on in life and business, not precisely, but practically, as he did before eyesight left him. He is still one of the advertising heads of the J. B. Williams Soap Company. He still creates and criticizes advertising for the firm and wades daily through the normal routine of work that the job imposes. He enjoys working and living in practically, though again not precisely, the way he did prior to the time the curtain fell.

I have said before and I repeat that there is nothing of magic or vaudeville trickery of any sort in his achievement. His mail is read to him. He operates a typewriter himself by the touch system, but of course dictates most of his correspondence. Advertising illustrations are described to him by associates. A little time of listening to a description of an illustration and cross-fire comment on it and he is able to obtain a mental picture of the original by which he can intelligently criticize and suggest.

The criticisms and suggestions are of value because Hurst lost nothing of himself but his eyesight, and his reactions, in consequence, are normal.

Not long since he spoke at a Yale alumni dinner in Hartford. After the dinner a friend discovered that most of those who had heard him had no idea he was sightless. The physical evidence of the fact is as plain in the case of Hurst as with any other man similarly afflicted.

But all the evidence there is is physical and it is astounding how slight a showing it makes against the calmly courageous background of his mental normality.

¶ GEORGE SINCLAIR HURST, *who creates designs and criticises advertisements without eyesight.*

The one thing about him approaching the uncanny in any way is his ability to picture strangers he meets and guess their ages by the sound of their voices. Talking to a business caller in his office recently, he mentioned some event in the past which his visitor said he did not remember.

"I suppose not," said Hurst. "You were in your cradle then."

"Not exactly in the cradle," the visitor said.

"No," said Hurst, "you were about fourteen when that happened."

"That beats me!" said the visitor. "As a matter of fact I was fourteen at that time. How did you know?"

"The ring of your words," said Hurst. "Words are like shells. When a very young man uses them they sound empty. As he grows older they become gradually filled with his experience, his understanding of what they mean. I can get ages pretty close by the fullness or emptiness of a man's word shell."

George Hurst himself is firmly convinced that he is an average man who has achieved (*Continued on page 122*)

an unusual accomplishment merely by the complete employment of the average man's equipment of courage and will. Believing this as he does, he is almost fanatically eager to broadcast to average people the fact of which he is proof, the fact that the worst human affliction is just as bad and no worse than the person afflicted permits it to be; the fact that it is within the province of average human power to decide whether loss of eyesight, for example, is a horrible, all-paralyzing curse, or just an inconvenience.

PICTURE him as I saw him last in his office on a clear October day, seated in a swivel chair before his desk, a man of the Henry Ford type, tall, spare, strong, sensitive, smoking a good deal, freely using expressive hands and features to emphasize his words, aglow with the emotional urge to get his message of hope across.

"Tell people in trouble, particularly people faced with the trouble that I've had to meet, that if they'll just keep on going and do everything that they can do, it isn't anywhere near as bad as imagination pictures it.

"The most horrid vision of all to me was that of going for life into an inky blackness. It isn't like that at all. Not a bit of it. It is like a great colorless shell which may be dull and forbidding or glowing and luminous with light and hope, according to the soul each man puts into it.

"Be sure to get this over, for I believe that the principle holds good for adversity in all its million phases. Don't let people be bluffed out of their courage!

"Very seldom is anything as bad as we are accustomed to believe before we have experienced it. If people will screw their courage to the sticking point and hold it there until the first sickening shock is passed, I can absolutely guarantee them, if the case is one of blindness, that they will come through all right, and that there will be plenty of things worth living for still left to them.

"Tell them to put their best into what is left of them and keep their minds full of interesting enterprises. Don't let them think that they die when they go blind. They don't! That thing we call our soul, tell them to keep that bright and strong and steadfast.

"Tell them to convert static fortitude into kinetic courage. There's a whole world of difference between the two states."

"How are they to go about doing that?" I asked.

"You have to stand fast," he explained. "It's like bathing in a heavy surf. A big wave sweeps over you and you have to hold your breath until it has passed. You know that it will pass and that when it does you can lift your head above the surface and get air again. When the spiritual waves of melancholia sweep over you the same thing is necessary.

"One of the first big jobs I had was to cut out rebelliousness, bitterness and resignation. All bad. A sweet resignation may perhaps be genuinely religious, but often it is only bootlicking on a huge scale. When a man resigns himself to the idea that some one away up in the azure has deliberately singled him out and hurt him, he might as well quit. He's a shadow fighter from then on. Meek acceptance of affliction is a detached neutrality at best, like lying down when the fighting is at its hottest.

"At first I was horrified by the delusion that blindness was a fixed condition, alike for all people and unchangeable. The blindman was a fixed character in my mind, like the stage Jew or the mother-in-law. Hand-organs, white dogs, shoe-laces and whisk-brooms all belonged to the blind.

"I had to banish those ideas from my mind. I know now that it was legitimate riddance. They were lies. All lies. The fact is nothing like the anticipation. I know now that it is not so much what is taken from a man as what is left to him that determines what he will do and what he can do. Lots of things were left to me. Books, music, business and people. Life is the same now as it was before, except that the rules were suddenly changed for me. It is still a game, though, and a good one."

"You see things mentally?" I asked. "Pictures of the world about you?"

"Of course," he said emphatically. "Vividly. A voice creates for me the picture of the person who speaks. It may be erroneous, but it is a clear picture."

He paused and pointed to a number of pasteboard counter advertisements on his desk-top.

"Obviously I've never seen those," he said. "But I designed them. I know what they look like, have a perfectly clear picture of them in my mind. I know the shape and location and appearance of every spot of color on them. I get so clear a vision of things which are described to me that in recalling a scene I often have to stop and think whether it was one I actually saw or one of which I heard. When my eyes were going I used to test them by holding my hand before my face. I can't tell when I last actually saw it; can't determine the precise time when vision ceased and imagination went on unaided."

He paused for a moment and re-lighted his pipe. I have been told that people who have lost their eyesight soon lose their taste for tobacco. Not George Hurst. He smokes with as keen a relish as anyone I have ever seen.

"AUDACITY!" he went on suddenly, emphatically. "Audacity and then more audacity! Tell people in trouble to keep audacity for their watchword. Tell them not to readjust themselves to the world, but to make the world readjust itself to them. Say this: Convert fortitude into courage. Keep on going as nearly as possible as though nothing had happened. As long as there is a chance of evading, averting or avoiding a catastrophe, fight! When you see it is inevitable, then forget it!

"Never take the world's word for it that you cannot do what you are trying to do. Make the world prove the impossibility of whatever you are attempting and prove it absolutely. The minute you get absolute proof that you are making a futile assault on an impregnable position, quit. Don't waste time or strength or further effort. Figure out a new line of attack and go that way. But don't take hearsay evidence from anyone that anything is impossible. Make them prove it.

"Then have a God. I don't mean a creed necessarily, but a God. As sparks of a moment, it is great to feel, as we flash, that we are flashing for our moment with the Eternal as a background. Get the idea that life is not just a short story, but a chapter in a long one. If you haven't got a God, make one. Make Him what you yourself in your best moments would be if you were infinite. Maybe the real lesson of this life is to get well through it without any absolute evidence of a God. Anyway, have one, a fixed point in this tossing sea of a world. That's important."

Hurst paused and thoughtfully fingered some small object on his desk.

"I guess it all sounds trite and old-fashioned," he said. "There is nothing new about it, but it works; it worked for me."

Trite and old-fashioned! Just so. Trite and old-fashioned and true. Nothing of the conjuror's trick about it. No suggestion of the tight-rope walker accomplishing a circus stunt by virtue of an uncanny instinct for

balance. Just an average man who had fought his fight with the old-fashioned weapons of faith and courage and will, and fought with them to such purpose that for the last eleven years he has done his work successfully without eyesight to aid him.

This, I think, is the great lesson George Hurst has written in the record for all who will to read. He stripped his trouble of all the horrible accouterments of superstition, delusion and tradition, and when the dread monster was thus denuded, it stood forth as merely an inconvenience.

I came away from my last meeting with him, my imagination lively with clear-seen figures of men I have known whose stock in trade was courage. Sergeant Yorke, Eddie Rickenbacker, Omar Bundy, General Harbord, Tex O'Reilly, Sam Dreben, Wolf McLean, General Smedley Butler and many others from here and there, a valiant, gay, triumphant gang of trouble-teasers. And clearest seen of all the lot was the tall, spare form of George Hurst of Glastonbury—who lost his eyes but not his vision—the fightin'est fool of the whole hard-boiled fighting lot.

HV1792
H
c.1
SLAVENS, WILLIAM McNUTT
THIS MAN REFUSED TO BE BEATEN BY FATE.

Date Due			

Bro-Dart INDUSTRIES
Newark 14, N. J. • Los Angeles 25, Calif.
Toronto 2B, Ontario Made in U. S. A.